

Moss Home  
McArthur and Broadway  
Oakland, Alameda County

HABS No. CAL-1897

HABS  
CAL.  
1 - OAK  
2 -

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
Western Office, Division of Design and Construction  
San Francisco, California

PHOTOGRAPH-DATA BOOK REPORT  
HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

CAL-1897  
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J. MORA MOSS HOME

Oakland, Alameda County, California

ADDRESS: Mosswood Park, Broadway & McArthur Boulevard  
OWNER: City of Oakland  
OCCUPANT: Recreation Department  
USE: Workshop and Storage for Recreation Department

BRIEF STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE: (HISTORICAL)

This structure was the home of a California pioneer who arrived in San Francisco from Philadelphia in 1854; and from a clerk in a bank rose to be one of the leading citizens in the State. He was connected with the first telegraph company in California, and the first gas company in San Francisco, of which he was one of the early presidents. He was President of the Kings River Canal, and the American-Russian Commercial Company. At the time of his death, November 21, 1880, he was President of the Board of Trustees of the Deaf, Dumb and Blind Institute, and a Regent of the University of California, since his appointment to the first Board of Regents in 1868. His wife was Julia Theresa Wood, daughter of Captain Wood of the United States Army, who served with distinction in the Mexican War. She was considerably younger than Mr. Moss. They were married in 1867 and combined their names to give the name MOSSWOOD to the estate.

PHYSICAL HISTORY:

The estate was purchased by Mr. Moss from a Mr. Coffey in 1863. After his death in 1880, title to the estate remained with his wife until she died in 1904 while on a trip in Europe. The property was ordered sold at auction by the probate court to settle the estate. Mr. Frank K. Mott had become Mayor of Oakland in 1905 and was anxious to secure the beautiful grounds for the City of Oakland. A bond issue was approved by the citizens for this purpose. However,

the property was not deeded to the City of Oakland until August 22, 1912 at a final cost to the City of over \$100,000.00.

Plans and specifications for a Gothic Cottage were prepared by S. H. Williams and contract for its construction was awarded to Joseph F. Heston on February 29, 1864. Mr. Heston defaulted on contract and was given notice on December 8, 1864. The work was completed by Mr. Moss under superintendence of Mr. Williams. (Original hand written specifications and contract are on file in California Room of Oakland Public Library.)

DATE OF ERECTION: 1864

ARCHITECT: S. H. WILLIAMS

BUILDER: Joseph F. Heston and others after he defaulted.

#### NOTES ON ALTERATIONS AND ADDITIONS:

The major addition to the house has been the one story Study and alterations to the library. This was done in the early 90's according to a statement made to this author by Joseph Moss Little, 3501 Broadway, Oakland, a neighbor and Godson of Joseph Mora Moss, who at the age of ninety in 1961, recalls when the work was done. Photographs of the house before this addition was made appear in the issue of the Oakland Tribune of September 21, 1919 on file at the Oakland Public Library. These pictures taken fifty years earlier show the veranda on the east side which no longer exists; but also show that the large bay window dormer on the east side of the main bedroom over the drawing room was a later addition. Mr. Little advises that he has what he believes to be the only pictures of the fernery. The wrought-iron fence that surrounded the grounds was contributed to the need for scrap iron during World War II.

#### SOURCES OF INFORMATION:

Considerable information and views are available in the California Room of the Oakland Public Library, including a Genealogy of the Moss family, and clippings from newspapers.

Mr. Albert E. Norman, Oakland realtor and historian of 380 - 15th Street, Oakland, has some old views among his collection of some 4000 slides of historical subjects, and has considerable knowledge of the Moss home.

The Historical Atlas Map of Alameda County by Thompson & West, published in 1878, and on file in the California Room of the Oakland Public Library, shows the Moss property as of that time.

#### ARCHITECTURAL INTEREST AND MERIT:

One of the finest, if not the finest, existing examples of Gothic architecture of French and English influence as adapted to wood frame domestic architecture to be found in the East Bay Area, and possibly in Northern California. Could be classified with the Gothic revival or Victorian Gothic of the mid-nineteenth century. The architecture is boldly romantic and elegant in detail, materials and craftsmanship. The architect referred to the building as a GOTHIC COTTAGE.

#### CONDITION OF FABRIC:

The exterior and structural frame are in very good structural condition, and the millwork is sound. The interior millwork, cabinet work and joinery is in very good mechanical condition in spite of the neglect and abuse it is receiving in the present service by the City of Oakland Recreation Department. The fine mahogany woodwork in the library and study is in serious danger. The woodwork and mouldings all over the house show the effect of ill treatment which is resulting in blight of public property of architectural and historical significance.

#### INTERIOR:

##### Overall dimensions:

Irregular plan. Approximately 63 feet by 48 feet.

##### Foundations:

Foundations and basement walls are brick, cement plastered to the water table.

##### Wall construction:

Wood frame with 6 inch T&G (5 inch exposed) siding with puttied joints. Studs - 12 inches on center.

##### Porches:

Porches and stair guards are wood.

##### Chimneys:

The principal chimney pierces the roof at the exact center of the symmetrical main element. It is a large chimney, the construction of which will be described with the interior. The chimney now is plain brick, of austere appearance, projecting not more than 2 feet above the roof. The original chimney combined the flues from four fireplaces and rose 12 feet above the roof, and was cement plastered with run mouldings and splayed corners. There were two other chimneys of the same height and design.

##### Roof:

Hipped with an angle of approximately  $52\frac{1}{2}$  degrees, has an overhang of 3 feet, with dormers built out 1 inch beyond the overhang and supported by moulded corbels and brackets. Covered with wood shingles.

Entrance:

Element projects out from the main body of the building  $4\frac{1}{2}$  feet; the second story above occupied by the bath room project 4 feet beyond that again in the form of a bold gabled dormer supported by very large pierced and moulded brackets flanking the entrance doors. The barge board is a heavy waving form graceful in design with perforated ornamentation, and with a tall slender pendent and finial that pierces the gable overhang. The finial is banded above the roof and then transforms from a square to a tapered square on the transverse axis. The pendent formed from an 8 by 8 redwood has chamfered corners with elements enlarging progressively and terminating in an acorn. The gable has a three-sided oriel window with corbelled support and a concave shingle roof and an attic window above.

Flanking the main entrance element on either side is a group of three narrow double hung windows with moulded mullions, and tied together by a hood moulding; centered above by a dormer which projects beyond the roof overhang, supported by moulded corbels and brackets resting on the hood moulding. The gables of the dormers with barge boards, pendants and finials echo the detail of the large dormer over the entrance. These smaller dormers repeat at the ends and rear of the building to give the composition a dramatic as well as a romantic concept. In all there are ten gables, seven of them visible from a single view.

The entrance doors are 5 feet by 8 feet, double doors with a pointed arch transom above. Each leaf has an upper rectangular panel with a trefoil at top and a square panel at the bottom enclosing a quatrefoil. The doors are 2 and  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches thick and are heavily moulded, and one of an original pair of cast griffins, 11 inches high and 2 inches wide, is still precariously attached to the door. The door reveal is made up of a series of Gothic mouldings and panels. The inside door panels are the same as the exterior. The doors are of softwood and were grained to simulate black walnut.

The sweeping railing at the entrance steps, of which there are five, has Gothic detail with pointed arches, tracery and cusps.

At the south west corner, or at the corner of the building to the right of the entrance, is a one-story element with an octagonal end with hipped roof and with gables. The gable on the south side is larger than that on the west and extends higher above the eaves. Both are very richly ornamented with carved barge boards, cusps, pendants and finials, even more ornamental than the main entrance. The pairs of double hung windows have stained glass trefoil designs and those at the gables have trefoil transoms in stained glass. (Newspaper prints in a 1919 newspaper on file at the Oakland Library of photographs

taken fifty years earlier do not show this element. Joseph Moss Little who was born and still lives next door at the age of ninety advises that this element was built within his memory in the early 90's.

#### INTERIOR:

Entering the home one arrives in a reception room or vestibule 12 feet by 12 feet with a pair of doors 5 feet by 10 feet in a pointed arch opening on the opposite side, with 3 feet by 8 feet single doors at either side. Each leaf of the double doors has a pointed arch upper panel of glass covered by a perforated cast iron grill of Gothic design that was made for the doors. The lower panels are square with quatrefoil panels on the diagonal. The doors are  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches thick with raised mouldings, and the pointed arch frame is made up of Gothic mouldings. These doors lead to the large main stair-hall. The ceiling height of the principal room on the first story is 12 feet 3 inches.

#### Drawing room:

Entered from the vestibule through a single 3 feet by 8 feet door. This room is to the north, or left of the entrance. It is 16 feet 4 inches wide and 21 feet 3 inches long with a 2 feet bay at the end. The fireplace is on the long axis of the room on the south and is flanked by the door from the vestibule and a duplicate door to the stairhall. The fireplace breast and mantel is of imported white marble with a pointed depressed arch opening, Gothic mouldings and pendants on either side. The mantel shelf is 2 inches thick, 15 inches deep and 5 feet 5 inches wide. The pendants of marble are 14 inches long and  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches thick, and octagonal in form. The fireplace opening, which is 3 feet 3 inches wide and 2 feet 9 inches high has an embossed cast iron closure surrounding a wood and coal fire grate.

Over the mantel is a gilded frame, imported from France, 5 feet 6 inches wide by 8 feet high in which is a plate glass mirror 4 feet 8 inches wide by 7 feet high. The top of the frame is carved with canthus leaves and garland design, and from a heart shaped central motif of coiled canthus leaves projects the head of a female figure approximately half full size. The windows in the room are set in deep reveals on the center axis of the other three sides, and over these windows are gilded drapery boxes of the same design as the top of the mirror frame.

A multi-member moulding forms the ceiling cornice in the room, and moulded tracery on the flat ceiling forms a diamond within a rectangle and with diagonals to the corners of the room. There are cast plaster rosettes or bosses at the intersections of the tracery, and a cast plaster center medallion from which hung the chandelier.

#### Library - Study:

The library is entered from the vestibule and beyond that to the south is the study. Mahogany book shelves flank the window and the entrance to the study which occupies the position of a window before this element was added. The fireplace mantel in the library is of mahogany and matches the design and detail of the marble fireplace in the drawing room. The over-mantel is of teared quarter round shelves and miniature balconies with turned spindles and with a balconied hood framing a mirror. The study with its matching mahogany paneling is of equal exceptionally fine quality and craftsmanship. The shutters at the windows fold back to form paneled reveals, and hang as true and fit as perfectly as when first installed. The ceiling of the study is coved and paneled. In the six panels down the center of the room are hand painted murals depicting a mother counselling a child; and then successively in the next four panels the child is engaged in reading and writing, the arts, the crafts, and science. The sixth panel depicts a coat of arms. Hand carved signs of the zodiac form bosses at panel intersections. Above the mahogany paneled wainscot the panels between the mahogany stiles and rails are plaster covered with wall paper. The flooring in this room and the library are teak with parquetry borders of several different species of hardwood. The finish of the woodwork and floors in these rooms have had severe treatment and exposure.

#### Dining room:

Entered from the stair hall to the east. The fireplace here, also, is of mahogany and matches the design of the marble fireplace in the drawing room. It has been painted. This room is being badly treated as a work shop and storage for paints and lumber. The detail in this room follows that of the drawing room though slightly more subdued. The east end of the room is octagonal.

#### Kitchen - Pantry:

The kitchen and pantry are to the south of the dining room and in that area the ceiling height has been reduced to 8 feet 6 inches. This area has been stripped of the original equipment and is being used as a work shop and for storage.

#### Stairway:

The main stairway has newel posts, hand rail and balusters of oak. The openings between balusters have fillers milled to form Gothic pointed arches at the top of the openings. The balustrade continues around the stair well at the second floor. The stair runs are in three flights of approximately equal runs forming a "U".

#### Bed rooms:

On the second floor is a large central hall from which open three major bed rooms and the bath room, over the entrance. A gallery

on the east side over the main stairs leads to three smaller bed rooms, two of which are over the kitchen and reached by a short flight of stairs. The ceiling height of the main rooms is 10 feet with a splay starting at the plate line at 8 feet 6 inches.

The master bed room is over the drawing room and of the same size. It has a marble fireplace over the fireplace in the drawing room. On the east side of the room is a rather large bay 7 feet 4 inches wide and 5 feet 6 inches deep and octagonal in plan corbeled out at the floor line.

Another bed room with fireplace occupies the space over the library and it is the chimneys from these fireplaces that are joined in the attic to form one large chimney on the center axis of the building. These chimneys are each centered on two  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch by  $4\frac{1}{2}$  inch iron bars bent in the form of a pointed arch and bolted together at the apex, and bearing on wood blocks at the floor. Other bolted clamps tie the bars and masonry together.

#### Trim:

The trim around the doors in the reception room and other principal rooms on the main floor is heavily moulded to a depth of 3 inches and 8 inches wide. The base is 12 inches high with the top 4 inches moulded. The top most element miters up and around the door frames. The trim on the second floor is only slightly less rich with mouldings.

#### Hardware:

The hardware is mortise type with white porcelain knobs except the entrance knobs which are metal. Originally the hardware trim was silver plated.

#### Lighting:

Lighting was by gas manufactured on the premises, but the house has been wired for electricity. The chandeliers hung from cast plaster medallions on the ceiling.

#### Heating:

Heating was by fireplaces of which there are eight counting two small corner fireplaces in rooms over the kitchen wing.

#### Basement:

A full basement contained larders, wine cellar, servants quarters and other utilitarian areas.

#### SITE:

The house is oriented with the front facing the west, and in a park setting. A small creek (Glen Echo Creek) with a heavy run of water in



the wet season which had eroded a deep gully passed through the grounds a few yards to the east of the house and three or four wooden bridges joined paths along its banks. This creek is now carried in a conduit which has been covered over and landscaped. The original property, 27 acres, purchased by Mr. Moss, extended from Telegraph Avenue to the Glen Echo Creek, Mrs. Moss purchased the strip between the creek and Broadway from C. W. Hathaway after the death of Mr. Moss. The portion from Webster Street to Telegraph Avenue was subdivided; but the remaining portion of approximately 10 acres was retained in its landscaped environment and was enclosed by a high wrought-iron fence 7 or 8 feet high. This fence was sacrificed to the need for scrap iron during World War II. Many of the trees planted by Mr. and Mrs. Moss still grace the park, some of which were the first specimens in California at the time they were planted. Early photographs and references recall a veranda that stretched across the east side of the house, a gardener's cottage, and a fernery which was viewed from the drawing room at the north side of the building, as well as other out buildings. The fernery was an elaborate affair with a fountain cascading water over a natural setting of rocks landscaped with exotic ferns and plants. (Joseph Moss Little advises that he has a photograph of this fernery which probably is the only one in existence.)

#### EXTRACTS FROM ORIGINAL SPECIFICATIONS:

The original hand written specifications and construction contract are on file in the California Room of the Oakland Public Library. They were written by S. H. Williams, Architect, of San Francisco, and the price was \$14,500.00 plus building materials on the premises furnished by Mr. Moss. Mr. Heston defaulted on the contract. The contract is dated February 29, 1864 and was to be fully completed October 20, 1864. Mr. Heston was given written notice on December 8, 1864 that work would be completed under supervision of Mr. Williams and additional costs would be deducted from any sums due Mr. Heston. The \$14,500.00 does not represent the full cost.

The following consists of extracts and paraphrasing of pertinent information from the original specifications:

#### Brickwork:

Kitchen fireplace of red press brick floor to ceiling and kitchen hearth of brick pavers. Brick to be furnished for setting of range, but range not included. "Outside walls of main building to be brick noged top of foundation to underside of plate, laid flat on principal story and on edge of second story." Six mantels to be constructed of brick. (No reference is made to the marble or wood fireplace mantels) "The two front chimneys to be joined with an arch under the roof with iron tie at the ceiling line." Mortar to be made of "Benicia Cement and lime, cask for cask."

Weather boarding:

"1 $\frac{1}{4}$  inch clear tongued and grooved redwood plank in widths not to exceed 3 $\frac{1}{2}$  inches. (The weatherboarding as applied has 5 inch exposed width.) "The gables all finished with moulded barge boards those on the main house to be 4 inches thick and 3 inches thick on kitchen. Pinnacles and pendants to be 8 inches by 8 inches moulded as per elevation and terminated with small finials."  
"Moulded belt course carried around the entire building."

Roof:

"Slope lathed with 1 inch by 4 inch lath set 5 inches from centers and shingled with best quality of heart redwood. Ridges all finished with 7/8 inch saddle boards and 2 inch beads. The shingles are all to be 6 inches wide and corners clipped about 1 $\frac{1}{2}$  inches each way."

Flooring:

"Principal and second story floor to be laid with narrow clear tongued and grooved pine 1 inch flooring ... blind nailed."

Doors:

"The front doors made folding 5 feet by 8 feet, 3 inches thick with richly moulded panels, and hardwood rebated moulded batten in the center, the inner side moulded similar to outside; the vestibule doors made folding 2 $\frac{1}{2}$  inches thick with flat arched head panels richly moulded with tracery in the arched heads, the top or long panels to be glazed with cut and ground glass or French plate plains." (Note: These doors have the cast grills over clear glass.) "All inside doors of the principal story for main building to be 3 feet by 8 feet, 1-3/4 inches thick, moulded both sides, of Eastern White pine."

Door trimming:

"Front entrance doors to be trimmed with 8 inch by 12 inch uprights and 8 inch moulded and open brackets and Gothic moulded splayed jambs, with small 8 inch brackets outside of each upright ... the vestibule doors trimmed with bold Gothic mouldings arched head and beveled plinths ... all inside doors trimmed as above with square heads, throughout the principal story ... all 6 inches wide by 2 $\frac{1}{2}$  inches thick ... the second story doors to have 5 inch by 2 inch Gothic casings with plain plinths."

Front entrance steps:

"With 10 inch paneled newels, moulded cap and base, 2 inch steps, 1 $\frac{1}{4}$  inch risers, front edge moulded, sides guarded with 2 inch perforated and chamfered balusters."

Windows:

"Windows of drawing room and library of three compartments each 4 feet 6 inches wide by 9 feet high with 3 inch moulded mullions."

"Dining room 10 feet 6 inches high running to floor, divided into two compartments. Frames with 3 inch thick sills moulded, pulley stiles  $1\frac{1}{4}$  inches with moulded stops. Oriels project 3 feet 1 inch from building with roof to project 18 inches, sides and front with 6 inch pinnacles and 2 inch barge boards with chamfered edges and openings." "Sash double hung  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches thick. Sash of main building all glazed with first quality Chrystal Sheet glass."

Window trimming:

"Each of the windows in the principal story ... full trimmed with inside rolling blinds with boxing, backs, soffits and elbows, paneled and moulded." "Chamber story trim same, all inside blinds of clear Spanish Cedar."

Base:

"Gothic moulded base 12 inches high, second story 10 inches high. Bathroom wainscot 5 feet high of 1 inch narrow plain matched and beaded Spanish Cedar."

Main stairs:

"Steps  $1\frac{1}{4}$  inches thick, risers  $7/8$  inch, wall string  $1\frac{1}{4}$  inches, outer string  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches, with moulded cap run on the rake above nosing to receive bottom ends of balusters and the face of the string enriched with moulded band and bead on the lower edge. Stairs guarded with a Gothic open balustrade formed with  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inch by 2 inch balusters or uprights with top and bottom rails all coved, corners on both sides and angles neatly coved, the bottom newel to be 8 inches by 8 inches square Gothic, paneled. The rail 4 inches by 4 inches Gothic Moulded. All newels, rails and balusters to be clear seasoned White Oak."

Carpenter materials:

"Rough framing Puget Sound Fir (Douglas Fir). Sleepers and ground sills redwood. Inside trim on principal floor Port Orford Cedar and the balance clear redwood. Steps hard pine."

Locks and Hardware:

"The front doors to have strong brass flush bolts at top and bottom ... with 7 inch front door mortise lock with night latch, with large silver plated knobs outside and inside, vestibule doors to have brass bolts. Inside doors to have 5 inch mortise locks, Russell & Erwin's best make, throughout with white porcelain knobs and silver plated trimmings. Sash fasteners silver plated. 5 inch by 5 inch castiron lacquered butts."

Bells:

Front door to have bell with large silver plated pull, one bell for each of the three rooms on first floor and two from main

chambers. Speaking tube from chamber floor to kitchen with silver plated mouthpiece.

Plumbing:

"A bath tub French fashion to be set in the bath room and lined with tin planished sheet copper, 14 ounce to the foot. Two French water closets, pans and fixtures complete, 14 inch wash bowl set in bath room with Italian marble counter sunk slab and back. Silver plated faucets." (Specifications describe a rather complicated hot water system.)

Heat:

"Gas pipes of usual size from cellar under front doors to the several points."

Painting:

"All the woodwork inside and outside to have three coats of fine Atlantic white lead and linseed oil except the inside trimming which are to have two coats of oil color and one flat finish coat tinted as desired. First floor grained black walnut and second floor White Oak and varnished. Outside paint "strewn with two coats clean white sand". Cedar and oak to have three coats boiled linseed oil."

Prepared by

*A. Lewis Koue*

A. Lewis Koue, AIA, Architect

November 1961

APPROVED:

*Charles S. Pope*

Date: *February 16, 1962*

Architect, Historic Structures, Western Office  
National Park Service